

## Message Text

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ACTION OES-07

INFO OCT-01 NEA-11 ISO-00 AID-05 ACDA-12 CIAE-00  
INR-10 IO-13 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 EB-08 NRC-05  
SOE-02 DODE-00 DOE-15 SS-15 SP-02 CEQ-01 JUSE-00  
PM-05 /120 W

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R 121117Z MAY 78  
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1571  
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY  
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA  
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
AMEMBASSY DACCA  
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD  
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU  
AMCONSUL MADRAS  
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 NEW DELHI 7525

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS:PDIP, TECH, IN, US  
SUBJECT: INDIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

1. INTRODUCTION: IN CONJUNCTION WITH PRIME  
MINISTER DESAI'S VISIT TO THE U.S. NEXT MONTH, WE  
ASKED THE CONGENS TO SEND SUMMARIES OF THEIR IM-  
PRESSIONS OF SENTIMENT ON INDO-US NUCLEAR DIFFERENCES.  
WE ASKED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS: WHAT ARE THE  
POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF THE NUCLEAR ISSUE AROUND THE  
COUNTRY? HOW HAS REACTION MANIFESTED ITSELF? ARE  
ANY PARTICULAR GROUPS MOST OUTSPOKEN? WHAT WOULD BE  
THE LIKELY REACTION IF A "DISENGAGEMENT" BECOMES  
NECESSARY? HOW WOULD THIS AFFECT OVERALL BILATERAL  
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RELATIONS? HOW MUCH CONTROL DOES THE PRIME MINISTER  
EXERCISE OVER GOI NUCLEAR POLICY? IS HIS FORTHRIGHT  
STANCE WINNING HIM PLAUDITS? IN LIGHT OF THE RECENT  
NRC SPLIT VOTE, WILL THERE BE PRESSURE UPON HIM TO  
CHANGE HIS POSITION OPPOSING PNE'S AND THE MANUFACTURE  
OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS? HOW MUCH INTEREST IS THERE IN  
JANATA PARTY CIRCLES IN THE FIELD OF NUCLEAR POLICY?

2. NOT SURPRISINGLY IN A COUNTRY OF INDIA'S SIZE AND DIVERSITY, INPUTS FROM THE CONGENS SUGGEST THAT THERE IS BY NO MEANS A UNANIMITY OF OPINION ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE. WHAT IS SEEN AS A MATTER OF UTMOST URGENCY IN THE BOMBAY REGION IS PERCEIVED AS BEING OF RELATIVELY MARGINAL IMPORTANCE ELSEWHERE.

3. THE NUCLEAR RELATIONSHIP: TARAPUR AND THE ENTIRE NUCLEAR RELATIONSHIP IS CLEARLY THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT BILATERAL ISSUE. HOWEVER, THE INTENSITY OF FEELINGS ON THIS ISSUE VARIES WIDELY AROUND THE COUNTRY. GIVEN THE PHYSICAL PROXIMITY OF TAPS, ITS IMPORTANCE AS A POWER SOURCE FOR THE REGION, AND THE PRESENCE OF LARGE NUMBERS OF NUCLEAR SCIENTISTS, IT IS INEVITABLE THAT BOMBAY IS THE SITE OF THE MOST HEATED OPINION. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, MEDIA PEOPLE AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN GENERAL MAKE TARAPUR/NUCLEAR MATTERS THE, REPEAT THE, SUBJECT OF CONVERSATION WITH CONGEN OFFICERS. (THE SAME IS TRUE TO A LESSER DEGREE IN DELHI WHICH, AS THE NATIONAL CAPITAL, IS THE PREMIER FORUM FOR AIRING OPINIONS.) ELSEWHERE, HOWEVER, INFORMED OPINION SEEMS TO BE LESS EXERCISED OVER THE QUESTION. THIS IS SURELY A REFLECTION OF THE DISTANCE OF CALCUTTA AND MADRAS FROM THE AREA WHICH IS MOST DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE TARAPUR INSTALLATION AND WELL AS OF THE USUAL TENDENCY IN

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INDIA TO FOCUS UPON PAROCHIAL PROBLEMS CLOSER TO HOME. THE CONTINUED SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY TO WESTERN INDIA IS SUCH A LOCAL ISSUE FOR THE BOMBAY REGION; HENCE THE SPECIAL INTEREST WHICH NUCLEAR AFFAIRS EVOKE THERE. IT IS ALSO PROBABLY TRUE TO CONCLUDE THAT POPULAR AWARENESS OF THIS ISSUE IS MARGINAL IF AT ALL EXISTENT OUTSIDE THE MAJOR CITIES AND IN THE RURAL AREAS WHERE THE MAJORITY OF INDIA'S POPULATION LIVES.

4. THE ABOVE NOTWITHSTANDING, THERE DOES SEEM TO BE A COMMON THREAD IN EDITORIAL COMMENT AND GENERAL OPINION WHICH WE AND THE CONGENS DETECT: TARAPUR AND THE NUCLEAR RELATIONSHIP ARE PERCEIVED IN HIGHLY NATIONALISTIC -- AND EMOTIONAL -- TERMS. THERE IS LITTLE OR NO INTEREST IN NUCLEAR POLICY PER SE, NOR IN TARAPUR'S RELATIONSHIP TO OVERALL U.S. GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES VIS A VIS WORLD-WIDE NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION. RATHER, OUR DIFFERENCES OVER NUCLEAR AFFAIRS HAVE PROVIDED THE VEHICLE FOR THE

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTA

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMBAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 5)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EXPRESSION OF AN OUTRAGED NATIONAL EGO. TARAPUR HAS SHARPENED AND GIVEN VOICE TO AN AMBITIOUS NATIONALISM WHICH VIEWS AMERICAN POLICY AS DISCRIMINATORY AND AS AN AFFRONT TO INDIA'S SELF-ESTEEM. MUCH OF THE CRITICISM IS COUCHED IN MORALISTIC-LEGALISTIC TERMS INVOLVING THE UNILATERAL ABROGATION BY THE U.S. OF A VALID CONTRACT, THE TERMS OF WHICH INDIA HAS SCRUPULOUSLY MET. HOWEVER, TO AN INCREASING DEGREE COMMENT IS FOCUSING ON WHAT INDIANS PERCEIVE TO BE A BLATANTLY DISCRIMINATORY STANCE BY THE U.S. EXPLANATIONS OF OUR WORLD-WIDE INTEREST IN PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF WEAPONS TECHNOLOGY FALL IN DEAF EARS. IN THIS CONNECTION, IT IS IMPORTANT  
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TO NOTE THAT MANY INFORMED INDIANS BELIEVE THAT THE NRC'S "UNDUE HASTE" TO LICENSE A SHIPMENT TO SEVERAL EURATOM COUNTRIES WHILE REFUSING TO SANCTION THE

XSNM-1060 SHIPMENT IS YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE BIAS OF THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, AS REPRESENTED BY THE U.S., AGAINST THE LDC'S, AS REPRESENTED BY INDIA. IT IS IN THIS SENSE THAT MANY OPINION-MAKERS VIEW TARAPUR AS THE TOUCHSTONE UPON WHICH THE TRUE WESTERN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THIRD WORLD ARE TO BE JUDGED. THUS FAR, THE JUDGEMENT HAS BEEN HIGHLY CRITICAL AND HIGHLY INDIGNANT. IT IS BECAUSE TARAPUR HAS AROUSED SUCH HIGHLY-CHARGED EMOTIONS OVER THE ALLEGED AMERICAN INDIFFERENCE TO THE NEEDS OF A MAJOR THIRD WORLD COUNTRY THAT THE ATMOSPHERE HAS BECOME LESS AND LESS CONDUCTIVE TO RATIONAL DISCUSSION OF OUR DIFFERENCES OVER NUCLEAR POLICY.

5. WE BELIEVE THAT AT PRESENT THESE VIEWS ON NUCLEAR AFFAIRS ARE RESTRICTED TO A RELATIVELY SMALL PROPORTION OF THE INDIAN POPULACE --MAINLY THE ELITES IN GOVERNMENT, POLITICS, JOURNALISM, ACADEMIA, THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS. NONETHELESS, A "DISENGAGEMENT" BETWEEN INDIA AND THE U.S. IN NUCLEAR RELATIONS COULD PRODUCE REPERCUSSIONS ON A BROADER SCALE. AS WE HAVE POINTED OUT, THE ATMOSPHERE VARIES AROUND THE COUNTRY. OPINION IN BOMBAY IS MOST "HAWKISH", GOING TO THE POINT WHERE THERE SEEMS TO BE UNANIMITY THAT A "DISENGAGEMENT" (OR EVEN A WITHHOLDING OF POST-XSNM-1060 SHIPMENTS) WOULD PRODUCE AT LEAST AS SERIOUS A CRISIS IN BILATERAL RELATIONS AS THE 1971 "TILT" TOWARD PAKISTAN. ELSEWHERE, OUR INTERLOCUTORS ARE SOMEWHAT LESS PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE POTENTIAL REACTION, BUT THEY DO NOTE THAT IT CERTAINLY WILL BE A NEGATIVE ONE. THE DEGREE OF THIS REACTION, IF CONFIDENTIAL

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COURSE, WILL LARGELY DEPEND UPON THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE PRESS, THE POLITICIANS AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES SEEK TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION FOR THEIR OWN ENDS. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, THERE ARE MANY SUCH INTERESTED PARTIES BOTH AMONG THE OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES (NOTABLY MRS. GANDHI'S CONGRESS (I)) AS WELL AS WITHIN THE JANATA ITSELF. AND BASED ON WHAT WE HAVE SEEN THUS FAR, THE PRESS IS LIKELY TO BEAT ITS DRUM LOUDLY AND INDIGNANTLY. THE IMPACT UPON THE BULK OF THE POPULATION OF SUCH A CAMPAIGN IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS. NONETHELESS, AS WE HAVE LEARNED IN THE PAST, INDIAN UMBRAGE AT PERCEIVED AFFRONTIERIES TO "NATIONAL HONOR" TENDS TO BE LONG-LIVED. OVERALL, WE WOULD CONCLUDE THAT A BREAK IN NUCLEAR RELATIONS WOULD CAUSE SUBSTANTIAL - BUT NOT IRREPARABLE -- DAMAGE TO AMERICAN BONA FIDES IN THE EYES OF MANY ORDINARY INDIANS WHO HAVE NOT YET VOICED THEIR OPINIONS. IT WOULD BRING INTO QUESTION THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S TRUE INTENTIONS TOWARDS THE NEEDS AND

ASPIRATIONS OF THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES. MANY WOULD PROBABLY ACCEPT SUCH A DENOUEMENT MORE IN SORROW THAN IN ANGER AND TINGED WITH THE REGRET THAT A PROMISING NEW ERA IN INDO-AMERICAN RELATIONS HAS BEEN DEALT A SIGNIFICANT SETBACK.

6. MORARJI AND NUCLEAR POLICY: A GREAT DEAL WILL ALSO DEPEND UPON HOW THE PRIME MINISTER PLAYS SUCH A "DIS-ENGAGEMENT". HE IS PERCEIVED AS BEING VERY MUCH IN CHARGE OF NUCLEAR POLICY, PRIMARILY BY VIRTUE OF HIS HOLDING THE ATOMIC ENERGY PORTFOLIO. THERE IS INTEREST IN JANATA CIRCLES IN THE NUCLEAR RELATIONSHIP, BUT SUCH INTEREST DERIVES MORE FROM THE NATIONALISTIC ASPECTS OF THE ISSUE THAN FROM ANY GREAT CONCERN ABOUT NUCLEAR

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INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY  
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CINCPAC FOR POALD

POLICY IN ITSELF. IT IS PRIMARILY BECAUSE MAORARJI HAS ADOPTED A TOUGH AND FORTHRIGHT STANCE VIS A VIS THE U.S. AND THUS PRESENTS HIMSELF AS A PRINCIPLED DEFENDER OF THE NATIONAL INTEREST THAT HE CONTINUES TO HAVE A LARGELY UNFETTERED HAND IN MAKING NUCLEAR POLICY. THE PRIME MINISTER'S REPEATED INSISTENCE UPON INDIA

BEING TREATED ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH THE MAJOR POWERS STRIKES A VERY RESPONSIVE CHORD IN THE NATIONALISTIC INDIAN PSYCHE AND HAS WON HIM GENERAL ADMIRATION. OVER-ALL, MORARJI IS PERCEIVED AS A CAPABLE MANAGER OF INDIA'S NUCLEAR POLICY; THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE "COLD AND BLUNT" LETTER EPISODE SERVED TO ENHANCE HIS STATURE AS A CHAMPION OF THE COUNTRY'S NATIONAL INTEREST IN THIS REGARD. AT THE SAME TIME, WITH ONE OR TWO  
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PREDICTABLE EXCEPTIONS, WE BELIEVE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR TESTING AND TO DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS HAS GAINED GENERAL ACCEPTABILITY WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE RULING PARTY. WE DO NOT PERCEIVE ANY SUBSTANTIAL PRESSURE ON HIM TO CHANGE THIS POSITION.

7. THE ABOVE SAID, HOWEVER, WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT GIVEN THE EMOTIONALLY CHARGED ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING THE NUCLEAR ISSUE, THE FREEDOM OF THE PRIME MINISTER TO TAKE POLICY INITIATIVES IN THIS FIELD HAS BECOME CIRCUMSCRIBED. IT HAS NOW BECOME A MATTER OF INDIAN NATIONALISM AND PRIDE TO TAKE ON THE UNITED STATES AND STAND UP FOR THE COUNTRY'S RIGHTS ON THIS ISSUE. WERE MORARJI TO MODIFY THE CURRENT GOI STANCE ON SAFEGUARDS HE WOULD COME UNDER GREAT PRESSURE FROM ALL SIDES ON THE VITAL POINT OF A "SURRENDER" OF INDIAN SOVEREIGNTY OR ACCEPTANCE OF AN "UNEQUAL" POSITION FOR INDIA IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA. IN PARTICULAR, ANY SUCH SOFTENING WOULD SUBJECT HIM TO CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM THE INDIAN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY, WHICH CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN THAT SAFEGUARDS WOULD BE A MAJOR INHIBITING FACTOR IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS.

8. HOW THE PRIME MINISTER HANDLES A POSSIBLE "DIS-ENGAGEMENT IN BILATERAL NUCLEAR RELATIONS WOULD HAVE SOME INFLUENCE OVER PUBLIC REACTION. HIS MASTERLY TREATMENT OF THE NANDA DEVI AFFAIR QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY DEFUSED A BUILDING GROUNDSWELL OF CRITICISMS OF INDO-AMERICAN RELATIONS. A SIMILARLY STATESMANLIKE POSTURE, WE BELIEVE, WOULD HELP TO

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LIMIT THE DAMAGE WHICH A BREAK IN THE NUCLEAR RELATION-

SHIP WOULD CAUSE. WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT AS LONG AS MORARJI MAINTAINS HIS CURRENT FIRM STANCE VIS-A-VIS THE U.S. ON THIS SUBJECT, MOST OF HIS COLLEAGUES WILL CONTINUE TO BACK HIM FULLY. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, WE MUST AGAIN POINT OUT HE ACUTE EMOTIONALISM WHICH THE NUCLEAR ISSUE HAS GENERATED IN MANY INFLUENTIAL CIRCLES. AS THE QUESTION HAS BECOME INEXTRICABLY RELATED TO INDIAN SELF-RELIANCE (AND SELF-IMPORTANCE), WE IMAGINE THAT EVEN FATHERLY APPEALS FROM MORARJI TO ALLOW TEMPERS TO COOL WOULD NOT RESTRAIN CERTAIN OF HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT FROM PROCEEDING IN HIGH DUDGEON TO ROUNDLY CONDEMN THE U.S. GOHEEN

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